

# First Love Lost (Part 1)

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the necessity of maintaining a passionate love for Jesus while engaging in church activities and service.*

**Duration:** 26:38

**Scripture:** Revelation 1:12

**Topics:** "First Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of a vision of Jesus and hearing His voice. He describes the appearance of Jesus in detail and how he fell at His feet as if dead. Jesus speaks to him and reveals that He is walking among seven golden lampstands, which represent seven churches in the province of Asia. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having a fervent love for Jesus, comparing it to the devotion of Mary who poured out costly perfume on Jesus. He also shares a personal anecdote about a risky plane ride, highlighting the need to trust in God's guidance.

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## Transcript

I felt this impression to start a series called Love Letters from Jesus. I'm not trying to be exhaustive. You'll have to make your own study of the passages that I cover, but let me just set this first one up.

Might take an extra two minutes just tonight. In the book of Revelation, John, that young disciple who leaned his head on Jesus' breast in the Gospel of John, and then who outlived all the other apostles, we find him on the island of Patmos, where he's been sent as punishment. He's been exiled because of the testimony of Jesus, his witnessing for Christ.

While he's on that island, he falls into a trance-slash-vision, some state of ecstasy, and he has a fresh revelation of Jesus. He sees Jesus in a vision unlike we see Jesus anywhere else in the Bible. Jesus tells him many things, and then angels appear and begin to tell him things.

That makes up this very mysterious book called the Apocalypse, or the book of Revelation, the revealing of the last things. The first chapter is made up basically of his experience of the vision of Jesus, and the voice he heard, and the appearance of Jesus, which goes into some detail. Toward the end of the first chapter, he falls, as we'll see, at the feet of Christ, as if he were dead.

And the Lord speaks to him and tells him that he is walking among golden lampstands, which are seven of them, which are seven churches that were all in a half-circle, starting in Ephesus, a half-circle in what was called in the Roman Empire the province of Asia. We now know it as basically Turkey. So Jesus says that there are seven stars in his hands, and these seven stars represent the seven angels of the churches.

And that word angels could be translated messengers, and it doesn't mean angelic beings like Gabriel or Michael, because Jesus wouldn't write letters to them. The general understanding is that those messengers or angels stand for the leaders of the churches who represent the church, so the message is both to them and to the church. Now these churches existed.

These were seven literal churches. People reading the book of Revelation say that they're symbols of problems that will happen in the body of Christ throughout history. That could be.

Other people say that they represent seven successive church ages, with the first one being something I'm going to read to you today, and then followed by the next letter, and that the last letter, the seventh letter, seven in the Bible, meaning the number of completion or fulfillment, that that would represent seven churches' ages. Now where those ages begin and where those ages end, are they 500 years, 300 years? What do they represent? That's conjecture by some people, but I just want to focus on that these were seven churches and Jesus is writing letters to them, like there is existing today a letter to our church. There is a letter to our church, and part of being a pastor is to seek God and get some sense of the way he looks at our leadership, the pastors, and how he looks at the spiritual condition of the church, not how people visiting us see the church, but how Jesus sees the church.

Because what would it matter what peers think of me or what anyone thinks of me, good or bad, the only voice that will matter is the voice of Christ in the end. Amen? So there are these letters, and these are the love letters from Jesus. Why they're love letters is because Jesus is love, because Jesus is God, and God is love.

So anything Jesus says, even if it's corrective, is love. It's like you correct a child. You don't correct the child because you don't like the child.

You correct the child because you love the child. When the child puts their hand near the fire, you smack the hand. Why? Because you don't like the child? No, you love the child.

Children don't see that. Immature people see any correction as a challenge to them, to their independence, and who are you to tell me what to do? But we learn in life, don't we, that love corrects. It not only embraces, it encourages.

How many have ever had Jesus correct you? Come on. Haven't we all? In fact, whom the Lord loves, he what? He not only corrects, he chastens. He gives a spanking to us sometimes.

Have you ever got a spanking from Jesus? He has ways of doing it where he never touches you physically sometimes, and you know I'm being corrected by the Lord. So here's the letter to the church at Ephesus. This is the first church, and let's look at it.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, these are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, and deed means I know everything about you, and the word know there is not I progressively know like we would know computer science or we would know geography, but no, I know everything about you. I know everything you move,

every place you go, every word you say, every thought you think.

I know your deeds, and now to describe those deeds he says, I know your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men. That word wicked there means abominationally vile, nasty, disgusting people who obviously evil doers who are trying to creep into the church.

I know you can't tolerate them. Notice that Christianity, when God is working in us, we don't tolerate certain things. Christianity is not a religion of tolerating everything.

You don't tolerate somebody selling your kid crack cocaine. You don't tolerate somebody giving Oxycontin to somebody who you care about to hook them. So you cannot tolerate wicked men, and that you have tested those who claim to be apostles.

There were leaders of some kind, religious leaders who claim to be somebody, but they were really false, and this church had discernment, and they claim to be apostles but are not, and you have found them false, and you have persevered, have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. I mean this has to be, if we would visit a church like this, would you not want a commendation for a church like this? I know your deeds. I know everything about you, and you work hard.

That means you labor to the point of exhaustion. It means the word where the vein bulges on your neck because you're straining so hard. So this church wasn't lazy.

What was the work they were doing? Spreading the gospel, ministering to people, helping the sick, ministering, praying, helping, going, visiting, hard work. See Christianity involves hard work. No, but God has to do it.

Yeah, but he does it as we give ourselves to hard work. In fact, we should stop right there. I just wonder, love letter from Jesus, I wonder how many of you here even understand that language because to some of you, I shouldn't really say this to you so much, you're here on a Tuesday night, but to how many people does going to church on Sunday mean that's their Christianity? This letter says nothing about what they did in their meetings.

It said your hard work, your labor, and it wasn't written to the staff. It was written to the whole church, laboring, working. No wonder Christianity multiplied.

No wonder it was so explosive. The early church was giving itself to hard work, and not only that, they didn't quit. You know, anybody can do work hard for 20 minutes.

My mother used to give me chores. I did it for about 15 minutes. Then I ran out of gas, and I would quit, but this church persevered.

Notice how the Lord is noting all these things, and you can't tolerate wicked men. You don't care about attendance figures. If people aren't real with God and are not doing what's right and yet claim to be Christians and want to take communion, you go, no way.

You can't do that. Well, who are you to judge? No, this church was going to uphold the banner of Jesus Christ, and whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord, who names the name of the Lord, let him depart from iniquity. So they were guarding that, and that you've tested those who claim to be apostles.

Not everyone who goes, thus sayeth the Lord. I heard from God. No, you listen to them, but you check it out.

You test it according to the word. You discern their spirit, and you found out that a lot of them are bogus. They're charlatans.

They're still robbing from you. They're robbing you blind, and you've spotted them. They're false, and you've persevered.

You just keep on, and you've endured hardships for my name. It hasn't always been easy there in Ephesus, and you have not grown weary. Now, the thing about Ephesus and what makes this so real was Ephesus, of all the seven letters, this is the biggest city of them all.

This was the queen city of Asia in the Roman Empire. It was a place of trade, a place of business, a place of wealth, a place of sophistication, if you will. It was located right along a famous road that went from the Euphrates River way to the east, and it passed a big trading spot.

It had a temple in it called the Temple of Diana. That was the Roman name. The Greek name was Artemis, A-R-T-E-M-I-S.

This was a goddess. That temple was so huge and ornate that it was called one of the seven wonders of the world of that day. Seven things that people knew were beyond the beyond, and one was right there in Ephesus.

But this was a horrible place of idolatry. And not only was it idolatry, but some of the historians say there were thousands of prostitutes who worked in the temple along with thieves. But there were thousands of prostitutes because part of the worship of Diana was to have sexual relations.

That was sacred. So this place was polluted. And here was this band of Christians, and these Christians were so blessed and they were so special because they really had four letters in the Bible to them.

They're the only place in the New Testament that had four letters. They had the letter of Ephesians. Paul spent three years there.

Paul spent more time there than any other city we know. Three years, 36 months ministering, founding that church. Then he wrote three years later the letter of Ephesians.

Then we have two letters, 1st and 2nd Timothy. Timothy was in Ephesus because Paul had put him there after Paul had left and put him in charge there. So two letters are written to Timothy while he's in Ephesus.

And imagine to have those kind of pastors. I mean, you got to put up with me, but think of that. How would you like to have Pastor Paul and then Timothy? We're talking about heavy hitters here.

And then after that, there's this letter 30 or 40 years later, another generation. They're not sure of the date of revelation. Some have an earlier date which would make it 30 years after Timothy passed off the scene because John lived so long.

But others think it could be even longer than that. So lots changed. But this church has been blessed, phenomenal ministry.

And it's a great church. I mean, who in the world wouldn't want that commendation from Jesus? I know your work, your hard work, and you just don't go through it in a perfunctory way. You're straining.

You persevere. You don't quit. You don't start in a ministry and then drop out of the prayer band, this band, whatever.

You're involved, sharing, helping the church, building up the brothers and sisters. And then out of nowhere, Jesus... And by the way, this is the same kind of psychology that Paul uses. When Paul writes a letter, he does the commendations first, and then if there's any corrections, they come afterward.

And that's a good way to talk to people. Tell them what's good about them and what God is doing, and thank God for what's happening in their life. And then if you have a correction to make or something you want to bring it up, bring it over afterward because if you start with the correction, they can react badly.

All in favor, say, I. In other words, instead of going up to a person and saying, God showed me that you have a problem and I want to talk to you about it. It might be good to be, I thank God that you're a believer. I thank God you love Jesus and I've been watching you.

And you're faithful in the things of God. And God's done a lot in your life. You're not what you used to be.

And you thank God for the positive things. Then you get to what you have to get to. But then you do it in a spirit of love.

And now Jesus lowers the boom. Not the boom, but the truth. Yet I hold this against you.

Jesus holds something against them. You've forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you've fallen.

What's the big thing? Were they doing drugs? Were they selling crystal meth in the church? What were they doing? No, you've fallen from a great height. You don't love me like you did at the first. You've lost your first love.

Yeah, your doctrine is fine and your labor is good and you're faithful at it, but that means nothing to me in the end if you're drifting from me and you don't love me. So repent and do the things you did at first. If you don't repent, I'll come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

That's the church. The lampstands were the churches where Jesus is walking. But you have this in your favor.

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. That's another remarkable verse. Someone said, Jesus doesn't hate anything.

Yeah, he does and he's happy when you hate the same thing. Notice he doesn't hate the Nicolaitans. What does he hate? The practices.

So we're not supposed to hate the drug dealer because he's a human being that Christ died for. But do we hate what he's selling? Do we hate that practice? I heard from somebody yesterday about the sex trade in a certain country where parents are selling girls at eight years old to be raped and married slash raped by 30, 40 year old men. That's wicked.

If you don't hate that, then something's wrong with you. When you love Jesus, you hate a lot of things. Like you hate cancer, like you hate things that would hurt people.

Why does Jesus hate certain things? Because they hurt people that he loves. They ruin their lives. Even though they run for it and grab it, you hate it because it's got a hook in it that's going to destroy them, ruin their lives.

So he says, this you also have in your favor. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. It seems like the Nicolaitans, it's very hard to know who they were.

Some people think they're followers of a man named Nicholas from Antioch. And the general understanding is that what he taught was because God is a God of grace and love, you can indulge sexual immorality. You can let it all hang out.

You can do whatever you want to do because God is love. And in the end, it doesn't really matter. And the Lord is vehement about that.

He who has an ear, let him hear. Every letter of the seven that we'll look at, everyone, they all end this way. He who has an ear, let him what? Hear.

What the Spirit. Notice the change here. Jesus is talking, but then he says, listen to what the Spirit is saying.

So Jesus and the Spirit are being used interchangeably because Christ speaks through the Spirit. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. And the Spirit is still speaking today.

Spirit hasn't stopped. Spirit didn't die. Spirit's speaking to you.

Spirit's speaking to me. Is this not amazing that a church could be so good and yet come in for such a warning? And of course, the warning is based on this. Love is only satisfied by love.

The first thing that Jesus looks at is the heart. You know, when the doctor goes, stick out your tongue and say, ah, that might be the first thing he does. Jesus, first thing he looks at is your heart.

Because what good is it going to church, singing in the choir? Oh, let me go further. Preaching sermons and writing books and being busy at it and persevering if you see him drifting away. If you see that person drifting away from you and you love them, see, love is crushed when it's not loved back.

And isn't there that tendency in all religion? Let's be honest. When we first get saved, there's discussions about what that means. You've lost your first love.

You've left your first love. That word left is very strong. It's a strong word meaning you dump it and you depart.

In other words, you've moved away from the love you had at first. But some people say it's this way. You left me because I was your love.

Did you know that you can do the work of God but leave Jesus? Did you know you could pastor a church and backslide in the sense of drifting away from Jesus? And you go into church and you're tithing and you're singing in the choir, you're the keepers of God's house, you're doing whatever, you're an associate

pastor, you're counseling, you're going on missionary trips. Notice this church was not some kind of lukewarm place. This church was activity personified.

This was a juggernaut of Christian service. But Jesus said, there's something I'm picking up. Your doctrine is good but your heart's getting cold.

You fight for pure doctrine. You don't put up with nonsense. You know when somebody's bogus.

But oh, you don't love me like you did at first. I think Jeremiah says something like, I remember the days, I'm paraphrasing, the Lord speaking and says, oh, I remember the days Israel when you were young, when you went after me in the desert like a girlfriend goes after her boyfriend. I'm not thrilled by anything my children give me or do for me.

I don't want Levi to do anything for me. What fulfills me is when Levi puts his arms around me and gives his papa a kiss. Isn't that the way you are? Because when you love someone, do you want them to do for you or do you want them to love you back? Love you back.

Now, can some of you look back to a day, maybe you were in Trinidad, maybe you were in Jamaica, maybe you were in Puerto Rico, maybe you were in Brooklyn or the Bronx, in Australia, in Africa, and you loved Jesus with a first love, with a passionate love. The thoughts came to me as I was waiting before the Lord today, you know, when he was more on your mind than he is now. Because when you love someone, they're always on your mind.

When the little is prompting from Jesus, you would just obey it. And now we got stiff and we go to church and we're just, I'm a Christian, I've matured. Sometimes we think we're maturing and we're actually losing our first love.

We're getting stiff. I want to have the love from my wife that I had and keep it that way. I was in college and I'm older than her and she was in high school and I came home for a summer and I worked at a basketball camp in northern New Jersey.

I was a counselor at a basketball camp. There were some college players there. It was in the boondocks and my wife lived near Raleway, New Jersey.

Dad was a pastor, was traveling then. I, man, I used to write letters to her. She would write to me mushy stuff and I had to see her.

You know, that's how you know you lose your first love when you don't want to be alone with the Lord. You want to do for the Lord but not be alone with the Lord. What do you think the Lord's more interested in, doing for him or being with him? I bet he was being because the more you're with him, being with him, then the more you'll do for him.

It'll be stronger. So I had to go to see her but I only had a certain amount of days off. So a guy said to me, I'm going home on Friday night to New Jersey.

I'll take you to your girlfriend's house. So I drove down Friday night about two and a half hours and I went there to the Hutchins home and they received me and I stayed there Saturday, Sunday and the guy calls me Sunday and says, hey, we got to be at a place at 12 noon on Monday but I'm going back tonight. I don't want to drive on Monday.

I'm going back. I'm your ride. I'm going back Sunday night and I thought, I don't want to leave.

He said, look, I can only meet you where I dropped you off. Otherwise, you're on your own. I said, go.

I had no idea how I was going to go back. I was losing my job. So I wake up Monday morning early and I go, how am I going to get back? I can fly.

There's an airport here. I wonder how much it would cost to get on a little plane and fly to that place. See, because when you're in love, first love, you're crazy.

Come on, haven't any of you ever been crazy? Everybody been crazy ever? Put your hands together. Come on. So as God is my witness, Carol was here.

She'd tell you, I call this place at 8 30 in the morning. I need a ride. Where do you want to go? I told them, they said, we'll fly you.

How much would it cost? It's like all the money I had earned for the last three weeks. Yeah, I don't care. So they drive me to the airport, some little dinky airport there in near Raleway, New Jersey.

So I go to the guy and I say, I'm the guy that called. You're going to fly me to where I have to go. Basketball camp.

They said, yeah, your plane's out there. It's waiting for you. And I went, I went, that's my plane.

It looked like the little Volkswagen Beetle with two wings on it. But the money, the whole thing, didn't matter. Did you know the plane only sat two people, the pilot and one seat behind? That's the truth before God.

I mean, that was my first feeling of really flying. So then as we're getting back, it didn't take that long. I said to him, hey, pal, where was the airport? He said, what airport? I said, where we're going to land.

He said, there's no airport. I said, then when you're going to, how are you going to land? He says, we're going to look for a field and land. I said, you're going to look for a field and land? He said, yeah.

And he said, listen, as we're going down low now, he says, listen, they don't like when we land in their fields. So you got a bag with you. When you get off and I stop, you jump off and start running because I'm making a U and leaving.

And that's the truth. We landed. He said, all right, all right, all right, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, I get off.

And he shoves me out the back thing. And I run and I'm down like this with my bag. And he just makes like a quick U and then off.

And sure enough, this farmer or somebody up there comes out yelling, cursing at me, cursing at the plane. And I'm running down. I have to walk three miles back to the hood.

You think it mattered to me? I saw Carol for a few extra hours. That's first love. And you know what? When Jesus doesn't see that, he doesn't seem to see anything.

And he that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit is saying. Let's close our eyes. I remember the devotion of your youth when you went after me and you were crazy in your devotion.

You were like Mary who broke open her alabaster and just poured out that costly perfume. And the other people say, what are you doing? You're wasting all that money. But when you love, you don't care what it costs.

What in the world would it matter what it costs? Like the people I met in China, if it costs me my life, I'm going to love and serve my Jesus with every breath I take. I think there's some people who the Lord is speaking to and you need to just say, you know what, pastor? I love Jesus, but I know this is very confrontational and this is hard to humble ourselves, but it is what it is. I want to remember how it used to be with me and Jesus.

And I want to repent. I want to ask him to forgive me for drifting away. You see, he loves us so much.

This is what breaks his heart. It's like in Hosea, God is saying to his people, I love you. Won't you love me? I'll chase after you, but don't run and hide.

Let me catch you. It's full of pathos. I love you, Jesus.

You know, I gave my life for you. I've protected you. Before you knew me, I was watching over you.

And now you have no time for me. You have time for every other thing. Other loves have come in, materialism, money, television, children, family, and I'm squeezed out of all the people you would let be squeezed out.

You would let me be squeezed out. The cares of life, you're worried more about bills. You think more about bills than you think about me during the day.

And some of you have been looking inward, introspection, introspection. When you found Jesus, it was just looking at him and you were in love with him. And now looking inward, inward.

And the more you look inward, the less you're going to love Jesus. Get occupied with yourself. Anybody here that the Spirit is dealing with, you want to just come to the front and say, I want my first love back.

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